



## National Rural Fire Authority

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NATIONAL RURAL FIRE AUTHORITY CIRCULAR 2010/09

### **Rural Fire Fighting Fund Claims: Fire Investigation Policy**

#### **1) Purpose**

The purpose of this National Rural Fire Authority (NRFA) circular is to outline to Rural Fire Authorities (RFAs), the NRFA policies concerning Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigation in relation to claims made for grant assistance on the National Rural Fire Fighting Fund (the fund).

#### **2) Background**

The National Rural Fire Authority (NRFA) is responsible for administering the National Rural Fire Fighting Fund under the provisions of Section 46A to 46L of the Fire Service Act 1975.

In carrying out this function the NRFA sets policies in respect to managing the assessment process in order to make determinations as to claims for fair and reasonable costs for grant assistance from the fund.

Previous NRFA circulars have covered some of these policies and from time to time it is necessary that the NRFA continues to review and update policy to ensure there is compliance when processing claims.

In this regard RFAs are reminded to be aware of all policies set out within NRFA circular 2007/07 (Obligations of RFA's making Claims on the Fund) and NRFA circular 2009/11 (Review of NRFFF Rates & Schedules), and subsequent annual amendments.

#### **3) Fire Investigation Policy Relating to Claims on the Rural Fire Fighting Fund**

The NRFA policies for Wildfire Origin & Cause Investigation in relation to how this applies to the National Rural Fire Fighting Fund are:

- a) RFAs are required to complete an Origin and Cause Investigation in respect of all wildfires for which they seek to make a claim for grant assistance for from the fund.
- b) For this purpose the NRFA has classified Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigations into two categories, these are: Initial Origin and Cause Investigation; and Full Origin and Cause Investigation.

c) Initial Origin and Cause Wildfire Investigations:

- i. As a minimum an Initial Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigation with a report, is required to be done in respect of all claims on the fund.
- ii. RFAs must use the NRFA approved Initial Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigation report form. This report template form is available to be downloaded from the NRFA secure web site.
- iii. In addition to the Initial Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigation and report form, relevant notes of interviews with any persons spoken to, a map, a sketch diagram, and photographs, as may be applicable, are required to be included with the claim documentation when this is submitted to NRFA.

d) Full Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigations:

- i. A Full Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigation must be carried out by RFAs when making a claim on the fund in any one or more of the following circumstances:
  - where the total costs being claimed on the fund exceed \$30,000.
  - there has been damage caused to any property estimated to be in excess of \$100,000.
  - wildfires where serious injury or fatality results to any person.
  - wildfires where it is known that a crime has been committed, and police are investigating.
  - wildfires where there has been an offence under the Forest & Rural Fires Act or Regulations, in respect of which the RFA is considering taking action against a person or party.
- ii. RFAs must engage an NRFA approved Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigator when carrying out a Full Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigation. A register of NRFA approved investigators is available through the local NRFA Manager Rural Fire.
- iii. RFAs must use the NRFA approved report template, including all the associated appendixes, when submitting a Full Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigation Report with a claim on the fund, this is available on the NRFA secure website.
- iv. In the course of carrying out a Full Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigation RFAs could in some instances, determine a need to also engage the services of a specialist or expert e.g. Electrical or Mechanical experts. But before doing so the RFA must:
  - first seek approval from the National Rural Fire Officer, via the local NRFA Manager Rural Fire.
  - and if approved, only use an NRFA approved specialist or expert.

e) Costs of Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigations.

RFAs can submit the costs of a Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigation in a claim for grant assistance for fair and reasonable costs on the fund, only in the case of:

- i. a Full Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigation carried out in accordance with all the relevant policies as outlined in sections 3) d) to f) of this NRFA circular.

- ii. where the costs involved for a Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigation is lodged as part of a RFA claim for a fair and reasonable grant from the fund a condition of this grant is that the ownership of the investigation report will be with the NRFA.

f) Additional Requirements.

- i. In cases where the cause of a wildfire has been determined to be arson, or in cases where police are involved, the RFA will need to submit a copy of a police complaint acknowledgement form with the claim documentation.
- ii. Completed reports for all Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigations carried out in accordance with the policies outline in this circular are required to be submitted with the other claim documentation, within the mandatory 3 month timeline for lodging a claim on the fund.

RFAs are advised to go to the NRFA Secure Web Site in order to view and down load copies of:

1. this NRFA circular 2010/09 Rural Fire Fighting Fund Claims: Fire Investigation Policy;
2. the NRFA Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigation reporting templates;
3. the NRFA Guidelines to RFAs on Process for Investigations of Wildfires;
4. the template Terms of Reference for RFAs when engaging a Wildfire Origin and Cause Investigator.

The new NRFA Fire Investigation policies in relation to claims made on the National Rural Fire Fighting Fund take effect from 1 October 2010 and will be applied by the NRFA in the administration of the fund from that date.



Murray Dudfield  
**National Rural Fire Officer**